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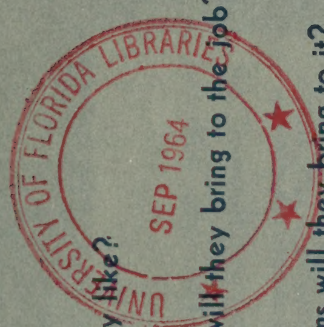


So You Are Going To Supervise a Mentally Retarded Employee

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What are they like?

What assets will they bring to the job?

What problems will they bring to it?

How do I get ready for my new worker?

How do I start him on the job?

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A Word About Retardation

Mental retardation is not a disease, or even an illness. Rather, it is a symptom and a name tag that indicates *limited ability to learn*, especially to learn things of the kind taught in the average school.

Some retardation is so mild that it is never recognized, and some is so severe that it requires lifelong institutional care. The retarded referred to you for employment will have been trained and certified as able to hold jobs by a trained counselor in a State division of vocational rehabilitation. This book is about such persons.

Perhaps we should say that they are persons "with retardation" rather than that they are "retarded" for though their intellectual capacity is below average, their total beings are not retarded. Their other skills and aptitudes make them valuable employees in the right jobs.

THIS IS SOMETHING NEW FOR MOST SUPERVISORS

1

WHAT ARE THEY LIKE?

2

MANY QUESTIONS
ARE SURE
TO COME UP

WHAT ASSETS WILL THEY BRING TO THE JOB?

3

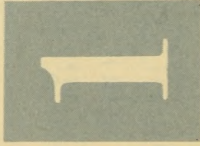
WHAT PROBLEMS WILL THEY BRING TO IT?

4

HOW DO I GET READY FOR MY NEW WORKER?

5

HOW DO I START HIM ON THE JOB?



What are they like?

They are like most other people—

They look like people you know.

They act much like anyone else.

They are not dangerous.

They can and do hold jobs.

They marry, have normal children.

But, because they are slower mentally—

They need help in getting their first jobs.

The mentally retarded are like most other people in appearance and in their desire for a job, friends, family, independence. Like anyone else, they do a job well if it is within the range of their competence and they feel comfortable and happy in doing it. But there is a difference. They have limited ability to learn—they don't think as well, or as fast, or as resourcefully as most other people do. This means that many jobs are beyond their abilities. As a rule, they are best in simple, repetitive, or short-cycle jobs—like attending machines, running errands, doing manual labor, performing simple hand operations—the very kind of job you may be having trouble keeping filled with suitable and satisfied "normal" people.

They know that they are "different," though all of them may not know that they are "retarded." Their own parents may be very bright, or average, or not so bright, for the causes of retardation are

many and varied and only about one in four has a condition that is physical or inherited.

Because they have a narrower field of understanding, they are less likely than you are to see the relation of one thing to another, or to find a quick and easy way to solve a problem. If you can't find the screwdriver, you'll use a dime on your cigarette lighter; the retarded person won't figure this out so readily. When he faces a new problem, then, he is not so likely to find an easy solution and it will seem to him a much harder task than you would consider it. On the other hand, once he's learned a routine, he does it well and he sticks to it, performing it in the same way, over and over again. He will often do this better than "normal" people would, because his behavior is so guided by habit. This is one of the traits that can make him a valuable employee in the right kind of job.

2

What assets will they bring to the job?

They come to work dependably and on time.

They are quiet, well-behaved, not inclined to gossip, or "goof off."

They are well trained vocationally.

They take pride in their work, try hard to please.

They stick with routine without getting restless.

They will stay with you.

Every mentally retarded person referred to you will be a client of a State division of vocational rehabilitation. He will have been tested, evaluated, certified as able to perform satisfactorily the duties of the job to which he is being appointed. And behind him will be a trained vocational rehabilitation counselor, ready to answer your questions about him and to give you any other assistance you may need with your new worker.

If you are like most supervisors, you want from your workers loyalty, dependability, good work habits, productivity, interest in doing the job—and no “troublemaking.” The mentally retarded person can be such a worker, if he is properly trained and placed and if you are properly oriented to his coming.

Although his intellectual capacity is limited, he often has a high degree of clerical aptitude, mechanical aptitude, physical dexterity, or other kind of skill. He wants to succeed on the job and to please

his supervisor, so he often puts that little bit of extra effort into making a success. He wants a *lasting* job, so he won't be either a “job hopper” or a “promotion pusher.” He will perform, happily, the simple, repetitive tasks that often bore the average worker, excelling at the established routines others find it difficult to stick with. He is dependable in attendance, displays a real loyalty to his supervisor and his job. “Stability” is a good word to sum up many of his attributes.

A Connecticut psychologist studied the records of employed mental retardates after they had been on the job 12 years and found: Employers rated them just as high as the nonretarded on promptness, regularity, friendly relations with fellow workers, and steadfastness on the job. Their weekly earnings compared favorably with those of the nonretarded doing similar work, and the psychologist predicted that most would continue in their present jobs until they retire.

3

*What problems will
they bring to the job?*

They think more slowly.

They are not as able to act on their own when a situation changes or a problem arises.

It takes more time and patience to get them started.

They may have to be told very simple things that others would catch on to without being told.

They get confused, and may not be able to act, if you give them too many instructions at once or if the instruction is too complicated.

This means that *until they've learned what they are to do* you have to tell them very clearly, directly, concretely, and perhaps often, what to do and then show them how to do it. You have to be alert for things they didn't know and couldn't think through themselves. And you'll have to prepare their fellow workers to expect and accept this. Though all this pays large dividends later, it does take time at first.

Because they think slowly and grasp only so much at a time, you have to prepare more carefully for their instruction and to be very patient at first. They tend to be very literal and may not understand abstractions like "high" or "away." So they may not be able to "put it away" or to "catch the phone" while you're out of the office or to "get that book from the library"—even though they can "put it in this box" and "go to the library and ask Miss Jones for this book, then bring it to me."

The retarded worker needs to be *told* whom to see if he has a question, when he's finished a task, when he doesn't know what to

do. He will be so eager to please he may even need to be told, *initially*, to go to the toilet; to go to lunch every day "when the hands on the clock get here"; to go home at end of work day.

Because he may be worried about the impression he will make, he will need to feel your support and readiness to help him. And like all other employees—perhaps more than others, at first—he needs to be accepted, appreciated, commended when he's done well.

A mentally retarded young man was on the verge of failing in a new construction job, one he was known to be quite capable of performing. The group with whom he worked, it developed, rotated responsibility for paying at coffee break time. The young man had joined in the coffee breaks but had no idea that he also had a turn to pay. The coworkers were angry and soon began to find fault with him, making the job more and more difficult for him. An alert supervisor got to the heart of matters and cleared it up in time to prevent a job failure.

A

How do I get ready for my new worker?

Review his background with those who referred him.

Decide what ground rules he *must* know.

Think what work you want him to do.

Break it down in simple steps, and plan how to put it across.

Have his workplace and supplies ready.

Prepare his fellow workers for his coming.

You probably interview your new worker before hiring him. But do a little more: Get a summary of his background and all available information about his training, adjustment, job readiness from the vocational counselor who is arranging for his placement with you. What are his good points? His limitations? How may these show up at work? Be sure to get the name and phone number of his vocational counselor and any suggestions this counselor has to offer about him. Remember, the vocational counselor is a trained professional who wants to help you and his client.

What ground rules does he have to know right away? He should know when and where to come to work; when to leave; when and how he'll be paid; when and where to eat; where the washrooms are; what to do if he isn't able to come to work; that he has to do something about life and health insurance (his family and his counselor should advise him). Don't plan to tell him any more than necessary at first—it's too confusing!

Now think through what you want him to do and break it down

into very simple steps—like pick up the mail; open the mail; sort the mail; deliver it. Figure out how best to do each of these and how to explain it. Then get his workplace and supplies organized and ready for him.

Finally, prepare his fellow workers for his coming. This isn't the easiest thing in the world. You don't want to embarrass him or make him feel like a child or a freak but, on the other hand, if they don't know he's a little different, his fellow workers may expect more of him than he can deliver. Perhaps you could try something like: "We'll have a new man coming in to help with this mail. He's been in a rehabilitation school and he's a little slow, but after he really learns the job, I'm sure he'll pull his weight. I hope you'll help us get him started right." You might also arrange in advance for one employee to act as sponsor or "buddy" for him, at least until you're sure that he's off to a good start. And make sure you don't develop a feeling of being "sorry" for him, for what he needs is your interest rather than your sympathy.



How do I start him on the job?

Here he is, all ready to work. What do you do? The same things as with other new employees—only a little less at a time, a bit more slowly, and with very simple words. Welcome him; make him feel at ease; introduce him to a few (not too many) other employees; tell him the ground rules (only the most important ones at first); show him his work station; and then put him to work:

Welcome him.

Make clear what he is to do.

Be specific, concrete, complete.

Take it one step at a time—and slowly.

Give him time.

Be available.

- Compliment him as he learns and does well, correct him when he doesn't. Simply tell him, very directly, "don't do that, do this." It's no kindness to him, and no service to your organization to accept unsatisfactory work or behavior when he needs to be told something is unsatisfactory. In the final analysis, his ability and willingness to do a job well should sell itself.

- Tell him and show him what to do. Use simple, specific words. For instance: "Untie the string and open the brown envelope. Take out the mail and put it here on your desk. Then put the empty brown envelope in this box."
- Have him tell you and show you. Correct any mistakes. If he didn't understand, try again for more concrete words, more complete instructions, more careful "show-how."
- Have him repeat the process several times until you know he can do this much.
- Add the next step—sorting the mail, for instance, and instruct him as above.
- Have him put the two operations together.
- Taper off as he shows he can do it, but continue to spot-check, particularly in his first few weeks of employment.
- Add other steps in the work process as you see that he has mastered, and retained mastery, of the preceding ones.

- Be available to help him with his questions, and let him know you are available.

Final Advice:

- Don't expect him to make many friends right away—give him time to warm up, and don't be surprised if he limits his friendship to one or two people at first.
- If changes in the work situation have to be made, explain the reasons to him so that he won't feel the changes are due to dissatisfaction with him.
- Don't go overboard about promotion even though he proves to be a skillful and dependable worker. He may be very good at the lower level job but not able to handle the next level because of his limits in learning and thinking ability. Both your personnel office and his counselor should be consulted if you consider any such move. It's better to have a well-functioning employee at a lower level than a problem employee at a higher level.

DO'S AND DON'TS OF SUPERVISING THE RETARDED

DO

Do learn about mental retardation and about the new employee you will supervise; ask your personnel office and his counselor.

Do take an interest in him as a person as well as an employee.

Do tell him things clearly, directly, and simply.

Do show, whenever possible, how the task is to be done.

Do tell him about working hours, proper appearance and behavior (if necessary), location and use of facilities such as cafeteria, washrooms.

Do be sure he knows of hazards and safety precautions for his particular office.

DON'T

Don't merely accept him because someone has decided he will be hired, and count on muddling through it somehow.

Don't feel that you are saddled with an oddball—he surely has good personal qualities as well as ability to do a job for you. Find out about them, and give them a chance.

Don't use complicated language or give half-explanations, expecting him to pick up the rest.

Don't simply tell him and expect him to do it in the particular way you want it done.

Don't assume that he will ask, or find out, if he wants to. He may not know enough about it to ask the right questions.

Don't feel that if a sign, or marker of some kind, is up that will be sufficient—it may not be!

Do correct his mistakes.

Do give credit for a job well done. A pat on the back is important to him.

Do check on his relationships with fellow employees, help him get acquainted. Learn what the group expects of him.

Do taper off your supervision as he shows that he can handle the job.

Do be available, particularly during his early days on the job, to hear out his questions or problems.

Do encourage him to do his job, let him feel that he is in a position that is not constantly changing.

Do treat him as an adult, even though he is less able than others in the learning and thinking processes.

Don't let them run on, thinking he'll see what's wrong and change.
Don't discuss work performance only when you have to correct him.

Don't expect him to make acquaintances on his own (unless you see that he can do so) or assume that he will know what coworkers expect of him socially.

Don't feel that you must watch him constantly—oversupervision can be as bad for him as it is tiring for you.

Don't be too busy or uninterested to make sure that all is going well, or to provide the listening ear.

Don't move him up, or consider him for more responsible tasks, simply because he does a good job in one operation—do this only after consultation with his counselor.

Don't treat him as a child, in the mistaken belief that the mentally retarded are simply "children who haven't grown up." This is not so—he is quite adult in most respects.

Don't feel sorry for him.

JOBS FOR THE MENTALLY RETARDED

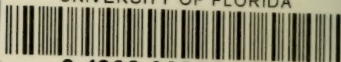
The mentally retarded have proved themselves in many kinds of jobs, especially those calling for simple skills, few decisions, and repetitive and established routine. They have been successful as:

Messengers
Office clerks
Office boys
Mail handlers
Stock clerks
Housekeepers
Nursemaids
Nurses' aids
Kitchen helpers
Porters
Janitors
Farmhands
Bakers
Upholsterers
Construction workers
Welders
Packers
Laundry workers
Carpenter's helpers
Factory workers
Filling station attendants

and in many other jobs. And the list of things they are able to do grows and grows as they are given opportunities to prove themselves.

The program for employing the mentally retarded is one that both Presidents Kennedy and Johnson have supported wholeheartedly. Its ultimate success, however, must depend on the achievements of the workers themselves and this, in turn, depends to a very large extent on you, the supervisor. The program stresses especially careful matching of persons with jobs, so that each appointee can perform with credit to himself and his employer—and counts on you, the supervisor, to help him prove that he can be a good—sometimes an outstanding—employee.

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